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Austria

Biotechnology

Implementation of EU Traceability and Labeling Regulations

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Report Highlights:

The GOA has amended the 1975 Austrian Food Law to conform to the new EU Traceability and Labeling (T&L) regulations regarding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). Public enforcement agencies are planning to carry out inspections to control ingredients and oversee labeling of possibly affected foodstuffs. Due to widespread public skepticism towards GMOs, Austrian retailers have informally agreed to ban all agricultural biotechnology that would have to be labeled according to T&L restrictions. The food industry will use paper trail and identity preservation (IP) systems to control and document this policy.

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Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Austria's Implementation of EU Traceability and Labeling Regulations

The Government of Austria (GOA) has amended the 1975 Austrian Food Law to conform to the new EU Traceability and Labeling (T&L) regulations regarding Genetically Modified Organisms(GMO). Public enforcement agencies are planning to carry out inspections to control ingredients and labeling of possibly affected foodstuffs. Due to widespread public skepticism towards GMOs, Austrian retailers have informally agreed to ban all agricultural biotechnology that would have to be labeled according to T&L restrictions. The food industry uses paper trail and identity preservation (IP) systems to control and document this policy.

ENFORCEMENT CONTROL AT EVERY STAGE

According to an official in the Ministry for Health and Women (MHW) responsible for "novel foods" and FAO/WHO- Codex Alimentarius, an amendment to article 10 par. 6 of the 1975 Austrian Food Law "Lebensmittelgesetz" automatically incorporates EU T&L regulations. The T&L regulations do not stipulate specific penalties for non-compliance for EU member states. However, Article 74 of the Austrian Food Law provides a framework for fines up to a maximum penalty of 7,300 Euro for individual violations.

Official enforcement control will be carried out at every stage of production and trade. Producers and traders are required to document products containing GMOs and forward this information to all buyers in the distribution channel. So far there are no set forms for providing information on the content of GMO products; but MHW expects that in the future standardized forms will be essential.

Information on the details of T&L legislation and enforcement policies can be provided by representatives from the Ministry for Health and Women.

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DAILY INSPECTIONS

The Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES) is in charge of monitoring the implementation of all biotechnology (including T&L) regulations. AGES is planning to carry out 345 inspections per year throughout Austria to control labeling. The inspections include product analysis and audits of documentation. According to the AGES spokesman, no violations have been found this year (products must contain more than 0.9% GMO to merit a violation).

INDUSTRY BOWS TO CONSUMER SKEPTICISM

The Austrian Food Industry Association (AFIA) emphasized that the priority of the Austrian food industry is "to fulfill the expectations of the customers." Since consumer attitudes concerning agricultural biotechnology are very critical in Austria, the food sector is doing "the utmost" to prevent the inclusion of GMOs in food production.

In addition to relying on IP systems, the food industry has replaced raw materials, recipes and suppliers in order to guarantee GMO-free foodstuffs. The AFIA currently has no information about agricultural export controls.

"BLACKLIST" FROM GREENPEACE

Greenpeace Austria has published a "blacklist" of all food producers and retailers who are suspected of selling GM products. "Under suspicion" are approximately 25 bakeries, sweets and cooking oil producers (out of 250), who have not answered Greenpeace's letter. Greenpeace asked the addressees for a guarantee not to release GMO-containing foodstuffs into the market. All major food producers have answered the letter to the satisfaction of Greenpeace. The next goal of Greenpeace is to put pressure on producers not to market animal products that have ingested GMOs, although these are not currently subject to labeling. Soybean oil, which is imported in large quantities to the EU, is also not currently subject to T&L labeling regulations.

For additional information on Austria's T & L implementation, contact:

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